



DEFINITIONS TO HELP UNDERSTAND GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION FOR EDUCATORS AND PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Many people refrain from talking about sexual orientation and gender identity because it feels taboo, or because they're afraid of saying the wrong thing – after all, language around gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression can shift rapidly. This glossary was written to give adults the words and meanings to help make conversations easier and more comfortable.

Note: THESE DEFINITIONS ARE FOR ADULTS. (For students, see the Welcoming Schools handout: [Defining LGBTQ Terms for Elementary School Students.](#))

Ally A term that describes a person who speaks out or takes actions on behalf of someone else or for a group that they are not a part of.

Androgynous Identifying and/or presenting as neither distinguishably masculine nor feminine.

Asexual A term that describes a person who lacks sexual attraction or desire for other people.

Bi Bisexual.

Bisexual A term that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to people of more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Butch Commonly used to refer to masculinity displayed by a female but can also refer to masculinity by a male.

Cisgender A term that describes a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Coming Out The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

Cultural Competence The ability to know one's culture and to interact effectively with people of different cultures. In a school this includes behaviors, attitudes, policies, and structures that enable educators to work effectively cross-culturally.

Drag Queen/Drag King A man who dresses as a woman, typically as a performance. A woman who dresses as a man, typically as a performance. This is different from transgender (see definition below).

FTM A term referring to a person, assigned female at birth who identifies and lives as a male. See transgender boy or man.

Gay A term that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to others of the same gender.

Gender A person's internal sense of self as male, female, both or neither (gender identity), as well as one's outward presentation and behaviors (gender expression). Gender norms vary among cultures and over time.

Gender Binary The idea that there are two distinct and opposite genders — male and female. This model is limiting and doesn't account for the full spectrum of gender identities and gender expressions.

Gender Expansive An adjective used to describe people that identify or express themselves in ways that broaden the culturally defined behavior or expression associated with one gender.

Gender Expression How a person expresses their gender through outward presentation and behavior. This includes, for example, a person's name, clothing, hairstyle, body language and mannerisms.

Gender Identity An internal, deeply felt sense of being male, female, a blend of both or neither—how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender Role A set of social and cultural beliefs or expectations about appropriate behavior for men/boys or women/girls. Gender roles can vary from culture to culture. Strict gender roles can limit a person's development.

Gender Role Stereotyping Stereotypes based on social and cultural beliefs or expectations about appropriate behavior for men/boys or women/girls. This can limit children's aspirations, achievements and well-being.

Gender Spectrum The broad range along which people identify and express themselves as gendered beings or not.

Genderqueer People that typically reject the binary categories of gender, embracing a fluidity of gender identity. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

Gender Transition The process by which some people strive to more closely align their outward identity with the gender they know themselves to be. To affirm their gender identity, people may go through different types of transitions.

Social transition This can include a name change, change in pronouns, and change in appearance, clothes or hairstyle.

Legal transition The process of updating identity documents, such as birth certificates and drivers' licenses, to reflect a person's authentic gender and name. Different states and localities have different rules, often making this process very challenging.

Medical transition For children, this may include the use of hormone blockers to delay the onset of puberty. It may also include cross-sex hormones to induce a puberty that is more consistent with the child's gender identity, or for adults, to promote physical changes. It can also include gender affirmation surgery after age 18.

Heteronormative The assumption of heterosexuality as the given or default sexual orientation instead of one of many possibilities, and that the preferred or default relationship is between two people of "opposite" genders.

Heterosexism The attitude that heterosexuality is the only valid or "normal" sexual orientation. This can take the form of overt negative comments or actions towards LGBTQ people or subtle actions or assumptions that marginalize LGBTQ people.

Heterosexual A term describing a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to people of a different gender. Also known as straight.

Homophobia The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex or gender.

Homosexual A term describing a person who is attracted to members of the same sex or gender. It is usually used in medical or scientific references.

Intersex The term used for 2% of babies who are born with naturally occurring variations in chromosomes, hormones, genitalia and other sex characteristics.

Lesbian A term describing a woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to someone of the same gender identity.

LGBTQ An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning. Additions to this acronym can include A, for “asexual” or “ally,” and I, for “intersex.”

MTF A term referring to a person, assigned male at birth who identifies and lives as female. See transgender girl or woman.

Non-binary An umbrella term for people who transcend commonly held concepts of gender through their own expression and identities. Other terms for this might include gender expansive, gender creative, or genderqueer. Some non-binary people also identify as Transgender.

Outing Exposing someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity to others without their permission.

Pansexual A person who can be attracted to any sex, gender or gender identity.

Queer A term some people use to identify themselves with a flexible and inclusive view of gender and/or sexuality. Also used interchangeably with LGBTQ to describe a group of people such as “queer youth.” It is also seen in academic fields, such as queer studies or queer theory. Historically it has been used as a negative term for LGBTQ people. Some people still find the term offensive while some embrace the term as an identity.

Sex One’s biological and physical attributes — external genitalia, sex chromosomes and internal reproductive structures — that are used to assign someone as male or female at birth.

Sex Assigned at Birth This is generally determined by external genitalia at birth – female, male or intersex.

Sexual Orientation Describes a person’s emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Some examples of sexual orientations are gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual or pansexual.

Sexuality Describes how one experiences and expresses one’s self as a sexual being. It begins to develop in early childhood and continues over the course of one’s lifetime.

Straight A slang term for heterosexual.

Transgender or Trans An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transphobia The fear or hatred of, or discomfort with, transgender people.